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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 January 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: A Worrisome Contingency in the Congo

The situation in the Congo continues to deteriorate. It may become grave, and the lives of Belgians and other whites may be endangered to the point where some kind of rescue operation may be required.

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1. The crisis in the Congo has become worse. Severe economic dislocations now seem almost certain, with possible attendant dangers to the Belgians and other whites. Given the intransigence of the Union Minière and the ill-considered and erratic actions of the Congolese, eleventh-hour efforts by the Belgian Government to arrange a deal between Mobutu and the Union Minière have only faint prospects of success. Though copper production in Katanga continues, none is exported, and the Congo's foreign exchange reserves are gone. The lack of

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foreign exchange to replenish low stocks of mining equipment and spare parts, as well as to meet the payroll, is likely to bring mining operations to a halt fairly soon.

2. In these circumstances, one of the most serious eventualities which looms ahead is the threat of violence against the 2,000 Belgian employees of Union Minière and their families in Katanga. Most are eager to leave the Congo as soon as possible, and have been encouraged to do so by the Union Minière though it would take weeks to move all the 6,000 or so people involved. If Mobutu permits a substantial number to leave, the copper industry will close down very quickly. It would be virtually impossible to replace key employees for many months. If the Congolese attempt to prevent the departure of the Belgians, racial tensions will mount, and incidents are likely to arise which will endanger lives. If the copper industry comes to a halt, Congolese officials will probably accuse local Belgians of sabotage, and the already strongly anti-Belgian Congolese press and radio will probably take up the cry. The Congolese army, thus far under orders to prevent harassment of Belgians, may get out of control, and such order as exists may break down.

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3. We believe the chances are increasing that anti-Belgian or anti-white incidents will lead to a situation wherein the lives of many Europeans in Katanga, and perhaps in the rest of the Congo, would be in danger. There are some 40,000 Belgians in the Congo (including about 15,000 in Katanga); there are also some 40,000 other whites, including 1,000 to 1,500 US citizens, most of whom are scattered in other parts of the country. Clearly, a rescue operation to evacuate even US nationals would be very difficult, and an effort to remove all Europeans vastly more so. The situation may not deteriorate this far; it is impossible to predict Congolese events with confidence. But in view of the recent turbulent history of the country and the critical nature of the present troubles, such a contingency should be kept in mind.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman

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